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SUBJECT: DS KICKS OFF FORWARD-LOOKING ELECTION CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY

1. (U) Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) officially launched its parliamentary campaign at a high energy, American style convention gathering on December 4 in Belgrade. Against a stage filled with the 250 delegates on its electoral list, speakers were brief but energizing with Tadic delivering a rousing address focused on Serbia's economic future (and not a word about Kosovo). The media images were in dramatic contrast to the gloom and doom provided by the Radicals and Socialists in their weekend campaign kick-offs.

2. (U) Amidst much fanfare, President Tadic's Democratic Party kicked off their campaign for the upcoming Serbian parliamentary elections on Sunday with a flashy rally to introduce their parliamentary candidates as well as their election campaign program, headed by the slogan "A Better Life for Serbia." An energized crowd of about 3000, which included representatives of Serbian cultural and public life, members of the diplomatic community, and enthusiastic DS and Sandzak Democratic Party (SDP) supporters (SDP is running on the DS list), watched as all 250 MP candidates were announced and paraded in (in reverse order of the electoral list). Speeches by party rank and file like Djindjic government Finance Minister Bozidar Djelic, PM Djindjic's widow, Ruzica Djindjic, and Tadic himself, were forward looking and energetic emphasizing democratic and economic reform and European integration as the path to a modern, stable Serbia and a better life for "the average citizen."

SPEAKER HIGHLIGHTS

3. (U) Djelic gave a rousing address, jogging up to the stage in true American fashion and detailing five post-election priorities for the party: (1) a national competition for the 1000 best Serbian business plans, (2) the establishment of a ministry for telecommunications, information technology, and the internet, (3) the creation of a state fund for scholarships, (4) the development of a society in solidarity, and (5) privatization. Rasim Ljajic was equally inspirational, drawing repeated cheers from enthusiastic SDP supporters, and emphasizing the commitment of the DS to diversity and rights for all social groups, and pointing out that the electoral list includes representatives from all national ethnic minorities. An unexpected participant at the rally, Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik, expressed his hope that the DS would triumph on January 21st and ensure that the Radicals would become a "part of the past" in Serbia. Ruzica Djindjic took a loftier route, emphasizing that the upcoming election is a "test of our awareness and consciousness of the future, a test of responsibility..."

TADIC: FIRED UP

4. (U) In an energized speech, President Tadic said that

his party will fight for the realization of its "simple ideals" - a higher standard of living for citizens, a better economy, and European integration. He alluded to Serbia's recent invitation to PFP as a concrete step toward achievement of these ideals, one which proves that there are "no unattainable goals." Additionally, Tadic said he considered issues of the youth to be of particular importance in this election. Saying that the citizens of Serbia have been "victims of a false patriotism," he said that the DS has clear goals and a clear vision which will lead to a "patriotism of security and peace for each person."

DJINDJIC'S LEGACY

15. (U) Throughout the rally, the party drew on the legacy of assassinated Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic as a model of their hope for the future of Serbia. Djelic recalled Djindjic's strong economic reforms. Djindjic's wife, Ruzica, who heads the DS electoral list, said that in the aftermath of her husband's death, she felt a loss of hope and ideals, but later found that the "underlying strength that keeps us moving toward democratic changes" had not been lost. Tadic also called upon the memory of Djindjic, referring to him as an inspiration, someone who "always knew how to solve problems and not look back, who knew how to compromise and sacrifice without sacrificing or compromising values."

COMMENT

16. (SBU) The DS convention was a welcome counterpoint to the anti-Hague, anti-US, anti-West diatribes that were simultaneously launching the Radicals' and Socialists' campaign. While there were ample references to patriotism

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and national pride, there was no mention of Kosovo and none of the ominous warnings that have characterized the DSS campaign. As Ljajic pointed out in his speech, perhaps the biggest challenge for the DS in the forthcoming elections will be to overcome "the biggest party in Serbia - those who abstain from voting." Within the next few weeks, the party plans to release a very specific plan detailing its proposed post-election improvements for all parts of Serbia, seeking to reach out to citizens through the country in an effort to show how the party will practically improve their lives. End Comment.

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